

WASHINGTON — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wants California to implement its own vehicle emission standards to fight global warming. At first glance, Congress might seem a likely ally in his efforts to overturn the Bush administration's refusal to let the state do so. After all, global warming is at... WASHINGTON — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wants California to implement its own vehicle emission standards to fight global warming. At first glance, Congress might seem a likely ally in his efforts to overturn the Bush administration's refusal to let the state do so.

After all, global warming is at the top of the agenda in Washington. The three remaining major presidential candidates back California's efforts. And the state's congressional delegation is the largest.

But legislation to clear the way may fail for a reason that is close to home for Schwarzenegger -- his fellow California Republicans.

Most GOP members of the state's congressional delegation are siding with the Bush administration in trying to keep states from imposing stricter regulations on greenhouse gas emissions than the federal government. Without bipartisan support from the state's representatives, the bill's proponents say, the measure's prospects are dim.

"I don't support California thinking that it can act alone effectively," said Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Vista), noting that climate change is a problem that extends beyond state lines.

A House bill to allow California and other states to implement their own tailpipe regulations was introduced last week, with the support of 27 of the 33 California Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco. Only two of the 19 Republicans -- Rep. David Dreier of San Dimas, who is perhaps Schwarzenegger's closest ally in the delegation, and Rep. Mary Bono Mack of Palm Springs -- signed on as cosponsors.

A similar Senate bill has 23 sponsors, including California Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, both Democrats.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Sherman Oaks), who with Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) is a chief sponsor of the House bill, said that support from the state's GOP lawmakers would improve its chances. "If we had a majority of California Republicans behind this bill, it would put real pressure on the White House not to veto it. And it would give us a real push in the Senate," he said.

It's not entirely unexpected to find the state's famously fractured delegation split over a controversial issue. It's been a year since California's Democrats and Republicans met together. In contrast, the Texas delegation meets monthly.

And it is often difficult to forge a consensus in the delegation, especially in a partisan election-year climate. "We have a very big and very diverse state, and we're not always going to agree on things," said Rep. John Campbell (R- Irvine), who opposes the bill.

The GOP opposition is somewhat surprising because the legislation would pave the way for a law that enjoys widespread support in California. A poll conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California last year found that most Democratic and Republican voters were in favor of it.

Republicans also typically support the rights of states to set their own policies. But Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Bakersfield), echoing a comment made by other California Republicans, argued that greenhouse gas emissions require a national or international solution. Added Rep. George Radanovich (R-Mariposa): "I think we've got to be all in this together as a country rather than Balkanizing it."

Schwarzenegger spokesman Bill Maile said the governor supports the legislation. By allowing California to implement "the nation's toughest tailpipe regulations," he said, "it will help us achieve our aggressive goals to reduce greenhouse gases." But a number of California Republicans in Congress say that they have yet to hear from Schwarzenegger or his office.

Under the Clean Air Act, California can approve air pollution rules that are stronger than federal ones, subject to the approval of the Environmental Protection Agency. The state passed its vehicle emissions law in 2002 and, after drawing up the regulations, sought EPA permission in 2005. But EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson in December denied the state permission to implement it. At least 18 other states have adopted or are considering California's emission limits, which they are allowed to do under federal law.

The congressional legislation seeks to overturn the EPA decision. California and the 18 other states have also filed suit asking the courts to reverse the decision.

A number of Republicans from other states -- including GOP governors of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Vermont -- have assailed the EPA decision.

Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.) told Johnson during a hearing last week that, "as a supporter of states' rights," he was troubled by the EPA administrator's decision. "There are a number of states, including Colorado, which would have considered following in California's footsteps to adopt a law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles," he said.

In rejecting California's request to set higher standards, Johnson argued that tougher nationwide vehicle fuel-economy rules included in an energy bill that Congress passed last year were preferable to a "patchwork of state rules." But critics of the EPA decision say there would be just two rules: a California one and a federal one.

Although the position taken by some California Republicans is at odds with the state's GOP governor, it is in line with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which believes that different state laws could drive up business costs. "This was a favor that the EPA did for people in California who want to make a living," said Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Visalia).

Rep. Wally Herger (R-Chico) said he was concerned that different tailpipe emission standards would drive up vehicle costs.

"I have the highest regard for Gov. Schwarzenegger," he said. "I just think this is not as well thought out as it could be."

The legislation to overturn the EPA's decision faces other hurdles. Rep. John D. Dingell, an influential Democratic committee chairman from auto-producing Michigan, is expected to work to defeat the measure. And it could run into a Senate filibuster or a presidential veto.

Still, the bill's proponents hope to build support among lawmakers from other states looking to implement California's tailpipe standards.

And they consider Dreier, who heads the California House Republican delegation, an important catch who might help build GOP support.

"I'm a proponent of states' rights," Dreier said. "States are the laboratories of brilliant ideas, and California is the single-best laboratory."